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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA AND NEA/IPA

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SUBJECT: TRIBULATIONS OF JORDAN'S "PEACE CAMP": ISRAELI  
ACTIONS AND LACK OF PROGRESS ON PEACE TRUMP  
ANTI-NORMALIZERS AS OBSTACLE

REF: A. 00 AMMAN 6421

[B](#). 04 AMMAN 4629

[C](#). 04 AMMAN 6771

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Sixty years after Israel's establishment and 14 years after the formal establishment of Israeli-Jordanian peace, the Jordanian atmosphere outside government circles remains hostile to advocates of reconciliation with Israel, and to those who interact with Israelis and Israeli institutions (even when that interaction consists of criticizing Israeli policies). Embassy contacts who have faced censure and sanction from the Anti-Normalization Committee of the professional associations today say their biggest obstacle is not those who oppose peace in principle, who have been somewhat cowed by the government. Rather, ongoing Palestinian suffering and perceived Israeli disinterest in a "just" peace have become their own compelling deterrent to "normalization." As one Foreign Ministry official - who typically waxes more pro-Israel than pro-Palestinian - put it, Israeli policies "are a big burden on those who want to speak in favor of normalization." End Summary.

Organized Anti-Normalization Takes Back Seat...

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[1](#)2. (C) The anti-normalization movement's gumption probably peaked with the publication in late 2000 of a "List of Shame" accusing a host of Jordanians (including some government officials) and Jordanian companies of consorting with the "Zionist Enemy" and demanding they repent (ref A). The list's release precipitated threats against some of those on it and instigated a backlash by the government, which sought to block the professional associations and their Anti-Normalization Committee from engaging in politics, a centerpiece of which was the blacklisting, disbarring, and pillorying of normalizers. In November 2002, the Court of Cassation's Special Bureau for the Interpretation of Laws ruled the Committee illegal. The professional associations drew government ire again in 2004 and 2005 for resurrecting the Committee, attempting to enlist Hizballah's assistance to secure the release of Jordanian prisoners in Israel, and censuring MP Raed Qaqish for appearing on al-Hurra television to debate an Israeli official (ref's B and C).

[1](#)3. (C) Since then, the anti-normalization movement has garnered only flashes of mainstream media attention; the GOJ has not paid the matter much attention either, at least overtly. Some of our "normalizer" contacts believe the government has become too passive, leaving them to flap in the wind. For instance, Irbid lawyer Shawkat Obeidat, who had "earned" himself a spot on the "List of Shame," remembers the bold stance of some earlier governments, including that of Ali Abu al-Ragheb, but claimed that today the GOJ does little to stand up for those who are criticized or ostracized

by anti-normalizers. This makes no sense, he assessed, as "all people who support the peace process are supporting the position of the government." In his view, the government looks at being a normalizer or an anti-normalizer as a choice, and in effect takes a neutral position. Note: George Hawatmeh, Editor-in-Chief of al-Ghad, suggested that PolOff take with a grain of salt claims that the government has taken effective action against the anti-normalizing policies of the professional associations, noting that the Journalist Association's bylaws still forbid contact with Israelis. End Note.

14. (C) Former Interior Minister Samir Habashneh, during his 2004-2005 tenure, took point against the professional unions for their attacks on normalizers. Habashneh recently told us his main concern at the time was the principle that the unions were stepping into divisive and destabilizing politics because the issues they raised tend to pit Palestinian-origin Jordanians against East Bankers. At the time he accused the Anti-Normalization Committee of acting "as if it were the sole trusted guardian of the interest of the country and its citizens," and said the group was not entitled to label people as patriots or non-patriots at its convenience. Habashneh told us that as Minister he felt he was the lone person fighting on this issue (indeed, he became considerably unpopular because of his stance against the professional unions). Note: Habashneh's outlook may be influenced by his own experience, having been blacklisted in the 1990s while president of a company accused of doing business with Israel. End Note.

15. (C) Marwan Dudin, a former Minister of Occupied

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Territories Affairs who helped negotiate the peace treaty with Israel and is now an appointed Senator in Jordan's Upper House of Parliament, agrees that the government has become more of an "observer" of the anti-normalization scene than a commentator. But he largely sees the government crackdown as having been successful, thereby obviating the need to make the anti-normalization movement a major issue.

...As Israeli Policies and Palestinian Hardship Make The Case  
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16. (C) Acknowledging that the Anti-Normalization Committee is no longer as active, many of our interlocutors nonetheless cite a palpable rise in anti-Israel sentiment, particularly during the second Intifada and the "siege" of Gaza. Those prevailing attitudes are the key factor today making it difficult to be a "normalizer," they say. Palestinian circumstances in the West Bank and Gaza as well as antipathy toward U.S. policy in the region have, in a sense, obviated the need for anti-normalizers to make their case.

17. (C) One frequent MFA contact, a normalizer in his own right, observed that the second Intifada and Israeli actions - "this killing of civilians, especially children; the Israelis should avoid that as much as possible" - have contributed to a more hostile overall atmosphere for normalizers than in the 1990s, when the peace process was bearing fruit. Israeli policies, he said, are a "big burden on those who want to speak in favor of normalization." Comment: This Foreign Ministry contact fits into the peculiar category of strongly pro-Israel East Bankers, sometimes referred to ironically as "East Bank Likudniks," who believe Israel and East Bank Jordanians share a common enemy, the Palestinians. Typically unprompted, he touts his ties with Israelis, expounds on the need for tighter economic and security cooperation between the two countries, speaks wistfully of former right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, and harshly criticizes Palestinians, in both the PA and in Jordan: e.g., "they don't deserve a state," "they have it better under Israeli rule," or "Palestinians here only call themselves Jordanians when they want something," to cite a few examples. He is certainly more insulated from

anti-normalizer attacks by virtue of his position, though he did mention his occasionally contentious relationship with his Palestinian-origin office director, based on his own more tolerant view of Israeli behavior and strident criticism of Hamas (and probably unconcealed anti-Palestinian bigotry).  
End Comment.

18. (C) Dudin, who was a senior negotiator with Israel in the 1990s, said the GOJ has always been prepared to push the Palestinians to accept a deal with Israel, even if it does not meet their maximalist expectations. But there are limits to what can be sold: "We cannot tell the Palestinians that they should want to have 10,000 prisoners in Israeli jails, that they should accept encroaching settlements around Jerusalem. The Israelis are not treating the Palestinians as human beings." Echoing comments from many of our contacts, he noted that few Jordanians today see either the fruits of the Israeli-Jordanian treaty or any rationale for continued engagement with Israel on the peace process. Dudin recounted how, when he was leading a group of intellectuals to a conference at an Israeli university on Palestinian-Israeli issues, Jordanian border officials pulled him aside and questioned why he continues in his efforts given that, in their view, Israel is not serious about peace. In the 1990s, said Dudin of his time as a negotiator, "I was a defender of the concept of negotiations, and was not just doing my job." That, he said, earned him a place on the "List of Shame." While Dudin sees no alternative to continued engagement with Israel, and makes this point to his critics, he sees little use in outspoken advocacy. "Why should I say that any more? I'm not being helped by the Israelis or the U.S. People tell me: 'Marwan, why don't you shut up.'"

19. (C) Sultan al-Hattab, a political columnist for pro-government daily Al-Rai and General Manager of the Al-Ourouba Center for Studies and Media Consulting in Amman, noted that he had attended the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 and was the first Arab at that time to ask a question of an Israeli official. For his troubles, he was kicked out of the Jordan Press Association. He recalled that he held meetings with both Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres in the mid-1990s. Since then he has grown disillusioned with the peace process's potential, complaining about U.S. policy (he said he was incredulous at President Bush's speech to the Knesset) and argued that "the Israelis are not giving us anything, no opportunities." Today, he concluded, there are simply no normalizers for the anti-normalizers to fight.

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Al-Ghad's Hawatmeh made a similar point, arguing that "Israel is their best weapon. And the U.S. of course."

Israeli Embassy Nonplussed By GOJ Response  
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10. (C) Itai Bardov, Political Counselor at the Israeli Embassy in Amman, lamented the lack of a real peace camp in Jordan to complement the one in Israel, but agreed that the problem today is not the formal institutions of anti-normalization, which have declined. Anti-Israeli feeling is widespread and not diminishing among Jordanians as a whole, he noted, which has had a chilling effect on the willingness of Jordanians, whether East Banker or of Palestinian origin, to engage with Israelis and Israeli institutions. Privately, East Bank-origin Jordanian officials will often express their preference for Israel over the Palestinians, but their overt behavior does little to change public attitudes for the better. "We get a lot of excuses" from the Jordanian government, Bardov said, including references to the poor conditions of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, the lack of visible progress in the peace process, and GOJ sensitivities surrounding Jordan's large Palestinian population. Reacting to the list of steps the GOJ had taken to curb the Anti-Normalization Committee (see above), Bardov was dismissive, saying "I wouldn't give the government a pat on the back. Formal anti-normalization

is illegal based on our peace treaty."

¶11. (C) Bardov said that what he is looking for is not pro-Israeli sentiment out of the local media - which is daily full of vitriol - but at least greater balance that does not ignore either the good Israel does or can do (for Jordan) or the troubling actions of groups like Hamas. On the Israel issue, "censorship - self- and formal - is terrible," in Jordan, he said. "A lot of Jordanian journalists don't publish the truth because they are afraid of being fired," Bardov claimed, mentioning an instance where one reporter told him he'd like to write something but it was too dangerous for his career. The Jordanian government needs to protect freedom of the press better, Bardov urged, by which he meant insulating journalists from reprisal. He added that "the international community should push Jordan to not let this anti-normalization go on. We need brave action from Western countries." Bardov recalled fondly the era of King Hussein, who came to Israel several times and was effusive in his outreach to Israel and Israelis.

¶12. (C) Not surprisingly, Director of Policy Planning and Research at the Foreign Ministry Omar Nahar - who was one of two Jordanian diplomats to open the Embassy in Tel Aviv and headed up the MFA's Israel Desk from 1999-2000 - offered a different emphasis. He described official relations with Israel as "brilliant," and said it remains standing GOJ policy to counter the professional associations and their anti-normalization activities. However, he saw little reason for a crusade: so few Israeli tourists and businessmen come to Jordan these days that there is much less fodder for the anti-normalizers. Those Jordanians who have already been tarred as normalizers probably have little to lose from continuing their business and other interactions with Israel, he judged.

#### Tales of Woe, Courage, and Absurdity

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¶13. (C) While the Anti-Normalization Committee may be in remission, many who faced attacks because of their perceived "normalization" are still suffering the consequences. Among our contacts are those who lost jobs, were expelled from their powerful professional unions, and faced societal censure. While most we spoke to have landed on their feet, for some the impact seems to have been a lasting one in practical and psychological terms.

¶14. (C) Hamadeh Faraneh, a columnist and a former member of parliament, was expelled from the journalists' union in 1995 for agreeing to be interviewed by Israeli television. In 1998, he became the first Jordanian MP to visit the Israeli Knesset and was promptly fired by the management of Al-Dustour, where he had been a writer. He spent the next nine years unable to find full-time work. Faraneh in his writings remains a supporter of the peace process - and has defended the Bush Administration's efforts - but says he now lacks the courage to pursue ties with Israelis so openly. Notwithstanding some recent good fortune on the employment front, Faraneh says it is harder today to be a "normalizer." Like most of our other contacts, he pins most of the blame on the deterioration of the peace process. While he maintains

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ties with Israelis, he no longer would visit the Knesset, in part because his family has suffered for his sins. For instance, his daughter, who recently graduated from the University of Jordan, was driven to tears by a professor who pilloried her for her father's misdeeds.

¶15. (C) It was only this February that Faraneh was hired onto the staff of centrist, pro-business al-Ghad as a daily commentator. Since then, the newspaper has received well over 2000 letters protesting his appointment. Faraneh offered to resign to save the paper any trouble, but Editor-in-Chief Hawatmeh refused. Note: That defense

notwithstanding, Faraneh's articles have caused Hawatmeh angst. In a conversation with PolOff, Hawatmeh explained that he had brought Faraneh on board - having published his work while editor at al-Rai - to take advantage of his strong contacts in the Palestinian Authority and the PLO. But from Faraneh's first day on the job, when he published a harsh criticism of Hamas for interdicting a Jordanian aid convoy on its way to Gazans under siege, "the whole world came down on Hamadeh." That "whole world" included readers, but also colleagues at al-Ghad. Although Hawatmeh touts the importance of publishing a diversity of views, he feels Faraneh goes overboard in his frequent attacks on Hamas. "Don't make it your whole preoccupation. The staff won't accept him. Public opinion won't accept him." End Note.

¶16. (C) Shawkat Obeidat's original sin was seeking to register an Israeli-owned company in Irbid. Later, in 2002, he was expelled from the Bar Association because he rose to defend Tarek al-Humeidi, a restaurateur who counted the Israeli Embassy among his clientele. Obeidat said he took that job for ideological reasons, because he is a strong believer in peace. After a court ruling in 2005 that said the Bar had illegally expelled him, he regained his membership and resumed the practice of law. He continues to engage with Israelis, albeit more cautiously. Note: He met us at a sparsely populated hotel in Irbid, searching around for a spot with few onlookers before he felt comfortable talking to us. Even then, it was only outside as we prepared to depart for Amman that he mentioned that he was on his way there as well to attend the 60th Anniversary celebrations of Israel's founding at the Israeli Embassy, and requested a ride. End Note.

¶17. (C) Major General (Ret.) Mansour Abu Rashid was Director of Military Intelligence in the early 1990s and then helped negotiate the peace treaty with Israel. For the past decade he has run the Amman Center for Peace and Development, an organization with ties to the Peres Center for Peace in Israel. In his view, attitudes toward engagement with Israel among the Jordanian public - increasingly including "pure Jordanians," not just those of Palestinian origin - have hardened in the last decade. He remains committed to improved ties with Israel, but his efforts to bring along fellow Jordanians are not getting easier. While he finds many in Jordan, particularly businessmen, who are more concerned with making money than with politics and thus keen on potential ventures with Israelis, they continue to insist that these activities remain as quiet as possible. Abu Rashid noted that his center still does not have a website, despite its being an organization that came into being with the government's encouragement. His concern is that advertising the work they do will only antagonize anti-normalizers. Although in the last two years the calls have ceased, for a long time he and his wife would get harassing calls from anti-normalizers questioning why he was working with Israel and Israelis.

¶18. (C) Ghazi al-Sa'di, a one-time Israeli citizen who was jailed for pro-Palestinian activities there before finding his way to Amman in the 1970s, is Director of the Dar al-Jalil publishing house, which translates Hebrew publications into Arabic and also teaches Hebrew. His first run-in with the Anti-Normalization Committee occurred in the 1990s, when members of the journalists union took him to task for appearing on Israeli Arabic-language television as a commentator on Arab and Palestinian affairs. He managed to secure the head of Jordan's Bar Association as his "defense counsel" in this "trial of his peers." Note: This was in the mid-1990s, before the Bar Association leadership had been taken over by Islamists (see septel). End Note. While he evaded a guilty verdict and expulsion from the union, he was instructed to cease his contacts with the Israeli media. Sa'di smiled as he explained that he merely stopped speaking on Israel's Arabic TV programs, but appeared - and continues to appear - as a Hebrew-speaking guest on Hebrew broadcasts. He has not since had trouble with the union, but noted wryly that members of Jordan's security and intelligence



establishment have privately encouraged him, applauding his efforts to present an Arab position to Israelis.

¶19. (C) A more concrete impact has been the effect of pervasive Jordanian anger at Palestinian circumstances on Dar al-Jalil's Hebrew-language instruction program. Sa'di notes that until the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 - which followed the collapse of the Camp David talks - classes were full and growing in popularity. It was not uncommon for Dar al-Jalil to run two three-month evening courses with over a dozen students in each, but these days the numbers have continued to decline dramatically; only four people signed up for the last session. Sa'di noted that after the Intifada broke out he began advertising his classes using the Prophet Muhammad's well-known saying, "Man 'arafa lughat qawmin amin sharrahum" ("He who knows a people's language is secure from their evil"; put more simply, "know thine enemy"). Sa'di noted that Israeli PolCouns Bardov, a friend, chastised him for taking this approach, and Sa'di explained that he was simply trying to insulate himself from accusations of being a normalizer. Offering a small ray of hope that perhaps normalizing has become more normal, Sa'di said that this past year he dropped the line from his advertisements. "Everyone is used to us already," he concluded, adding that through it all the newspapers never shied away from publishing the ads, and even have come to solicit them.

¶20. (C) Comment: Most of those we spoke to - Faraneh, Sa'di, Abu Rashid, and Obeidat, in particular - noted in one way or another that when faced by anti-normalizers, they often defend themselves and their actions by recalling that they have a strong pedigree as fighters (in one way or another) against Israel in the past. Faraneh was involved with the Fedayeen (and later a Jordanian member of parliament and is currently on the Palestine National Council), Obeidat claims he too was a feda'i, Abu Rashid fought in Jerusalem during the Six Day War, and Sa'di spent years in an Israeli jail. For his part, Dudin told us with a chuckle that when he appeared on the "List of Shame" he confronted Ali Abu Sukkar, then leader of the Anti-Normalization Committee, and threatened to have his entire tribe turn on him. End Comment.  
Hale